

THE ROLE OF Gods (*Ikpaisong*) IN HUMAN QUEST FOR RESOURCE CONTROL AND RESTRUCTURING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

There is abundance of crude oil and other resources in Niger Delta of Nigeria. It is ironic that Nigeria's oil boom has spelt out doom for the country. Amid oil wealth, only those who control political power, and the foreign oil companies acquire wealth with oil money while the rest of the people are left in misery, penury and deprivation. The Niger Delta that produces the oil is the most vulnerable because oil exploration has polluted the environment. The region was robbed of their rights and pushed to the wall by injustice, as a result the gods, who are the owners of the land from which oil is exploited come in to take revenge for their children by leaching out anger, violence, insecurity and conflict on the nation. Making use of participant observation, symbolic and analytical methods, the paper contends that for peace and security to return to Nigeria, the gods must be ritually appeased through equitable control by the people of the Niger Delta. With the deforestation of lands and rendering of the rivers unsuitable for fishing, the entire structural fabric which defined the Niger Delta region within the cosmological ambience of Nigeria is disrupted. There is nothing to replace this disrupted structure and therefore we conclude that the Niger Delta needs to be redefined within the context of the Nigerian state through appropriate restructuring.

Keywords: Role, Gods, Human Quest, Resource, Control and Restructuring

Introduction

Nigeria had once been described as the giant of Africa (Agbese, 1995). This was not an exaggeration. With a huge population of over two hundred and fifty million, Nigeria is endowed with an abundance of natural and human resources. In the 1970s the then-former Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon was reported as saying that money was not his problem but that how to spend it was (Agbese, 1995). As a member of non-aligned nations, Nigeria made its presence felt in international politics and led the crusade against apartheid in South Africa. However, that giant of Africa is now the open sore of the continent (Soyinka,

1996). Daily, the citizens keep dates with corruption, violence, hunger and insecurity, as Boko Haram, kidnappers and bandits rampage, militants destroy, and security forces brutalize maim, kill, assassinate and hang helpless citizens who dare to express curiosity about the mismanagement of the millions of dollars accruing from crude oil every day. According to Oko (2020:187), the level of social injustice currently prevailing in Nigeria is reaching alarming heights and citizens are beginning to feel the effect in the level of discontent amongst the citizenry as demonstrated by various uprisings against the state such as the Boko Haram incidence, the Niger Delta Militancy, OPC and Bandits. That giant of Africa today stands stunted before the international community. How has the mighty fallen? Similarly, to make matters worse, the gods of Niger Delta, the owners of the land that has been brutalised and vandalised are angry, first with their children for doing nothing about the abominable acts committed on their lands, and then the Nigerian nation by leasing out violence in all ramifications. This was re-echoed by Atanang, Ekanem and Oko (2022:198) when they noted that the growing violence in the country has made the country become the slaughter house where people and soldiers are mercilessly butchered every day like what is happening in Northern parts of Nigeria, Plateau, Benue, Rivers state and other parts of Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem:

People blessed with oil are blessed with wealth in every currency. However, this may not always mean that everyone is happy. This is not quite so. In nature, what is, is not what ought to be. In 1959, when Shell started its operation in the community of Umuechem, Rivers State, community expectations were high. The community thought Shell was coming to take their oil and in return give them social amenities, but their place was still in the dark for six decades of Shell Corporation (Olukoya 1995). Therefore, robbed of their rights, and pushed to the wall by domination from the centre, those at the periphery, the Niger Delta people resist vehemently, demanding the right to control their recourses? Nevertheless, resistance brings with it more repression, attendant violence, and social disorder.

The research was guided by some hypotheses, one of which is that at the root of domination, resistance and conflict is crude oil found at the periphery of Nigeria, and controlled by the centre. Another is that it is crude oil that lubricates the machinery of domination thus easing the oscillation of the wheels of conflict and violence. A corollary of this is that such lubricating activity extends to the already volatile ethnic situation in the country, making it a real political construct that can exacerbate and engulf the nation. There is a focus on the interplay of metaphors and symbols employed by the dramatis personae on the battlefield of conflict and the strategies adopted by each for their amplification and subsequent effects. Thus a symbolic approach is adopted in the analysis. It is with such an approach that we bring out the opposition is periphery-centre, above-below, latent in the social skin. The result of these oppositions is metaphorically interpreted.

Resource Control

As a definitional strategy, resource control is “the way and manner the government’s revenue and democratic dividends are shared among the various tiers of government” (Kehinde et al 2013:34) From the works of Itse (1995) and Ike (2001), resource control refers to the power and rights of a community or State to generate income by way or means of taxation of human and non-human substances within a given environment. Such ‘powers’ and ‘rights’ to initiate the taxation process are however limited by law, especially in a federal system of government where the powers of the central government are superior to that of the subordinate and constituent States.

In a system such as that application in Nigeria, there are certain taxes which the constituent States do not have the legal right to collect. Such taxes are left for the central government, by law, to collect and coordinate. Nevertheless, in such systems, the ‘derivation principle’, according to Omojuwa (2001) and Dibua (2006), empowers constituent States and subordinate governments to obtain some benefits from the income generated from their lands to the state. This is practiced in most democracies while it is still yet to be practiced in some others. The basic principle of resource control is the ability of a State government to exploit the natural resources of a State to the benefit of all (especially in a democratic State), such that every citizen, bonded by the State’s sovereignty and their allegiance to the State, has a benefit from the State’s resource. Resources can be reposed in various places. They range from forests (farmlands) to open lands, air space, land-depth resources (like oil and mineral resources), sea shores, waters etcetera. Resource control is a germane issue in the Nigerian government and politics. This is largely because of the value attached to resources by the government and the people whose land the resources are domiciled. The fact that huge benefits are reposed in resources is self-evident.

There are two sides to the debate over resource control in Nigeria. On one side is the government and the other is the people. The government argues that the Nigerian State needs resources to sustain the daily administration of the government and by the exploration and sale of resources; the government acquires some income with which to run the State without loss and deficits. In line with the ‘democratic space’, as Parkinson (2012) noted, the government is expected to provide for its people and must utilize every income made from resource exploration to the best interest of the people. The State is also expected to furnish an arena suitable enough to host its human society without glitches and catastrophes by allocating the right values and privileges to the people living in the various sections and regions of the State. This cannot be done if the State is in chaos and or is witnessing an unstable peace in its resources administration process. Peace in Africa can neither be overemphasized nor should be treated with levity (Okon and Ndubuwa, 2022:49).

The other side of the debate has to do with the people whose land the resources belong. They lay claim to the fact that, since the resources are domiciled in their land, they own them and they have every right of decision regarding its exploration and usage. To express and achieve

this, the people who claim to be in ownership of the resources form fraternities and groups to champion their agitation over the resource control system. Some of these groups are the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People, Ijaw Youth Council, Committee of Oil Producing Areas, The Ogoni Bill of Rights, The Ikwerre Charter of Demands, The Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta etc. These groups and their activities are all directed at influencing resource control in their region. Most times, their agitations are highlighted when they make strict demands from the government, by issuing threats to the government.

These two contrasting viewpoints, from the government and the people, regarding how resources should be allocated make resource control a critical issue in Nigeria. The spirit of this debate has resulted in several conflicts in Nigeria owing to disagreements from both sides on whose argument to yield to. However, most scholars have argued that, regardless of the central issue of resource control, there are complementary factors which affect and influence how resources are controlled in Nigeria. These factors are: politics, conflict, law and religion. As regards this paper we shall only the issue of religion is considered

Restructuring

Restructuring is a song on the lips of many Nigerians. It has trended for decades and seems to be an inter-generational topical issue in Nigeria. The persistent call for restructuring takes numerous dimensions, but particularly outstanding is in the dimension of politics. It is not surprising though, because the philosophy behind the existence of every state and the control of its resources bothers on politics.

Nigeria as a sovereign state has numerous ethnic-tribal groups as matched with its vast territory, large population and enormous land mass. Each of the locales within the Nigerian territory is endowed with either one mineral, vegetative or other natural resources and/or a correspondence of resident human resources (population). Because of this, any knowledgeable administrative analyst would suggest the adoption of the federalist political structure, to ensure efficient administration of both the vast territories of Nigeria and its ethno-tribal heterogeneous population. This is what has been administratively put in place as a political mechanism for governance within the Nigerian polity. The current Nigerian political structure which has its roots in the 1946 Sir Arthur Richard's constitution of Nigeria, right from its inception till now has shown symptoms of an administratively sick system of government resulting from such issues as the issue of resource control, outcry of marginalization, issue of ethnic-tribal and regional discrimination, and issue of ensuring that every citizen irrespective of age, sex, religion, ethnic, linguistic, regional or tribal affiliation is given a sense of belonging in the country. Similarly, this has also affected our judiciary system prompting Hammad (2020:6) as cited in Oko, Olusakin and Paul, (2023:7) assert that "judicial corruption has a lot of negative impacts on society and is one of the most severe threats to human right implementation in the country". Most importantly, the issue of resource control vis-à-vis political restructuring has become a contentious issue in Nigeria's body politic, having been a key problem facing the Nigerian state since the onset of ethnic

politics (Anugwom, 2005; Dickson and Asua, 2016). Despite the lopsided nature of the country's political structure, Nigeria has persisted in the practice and has always resolved to the meting out of punitive measures to the dysfunctional issues; marking the nature of the federalist political structure operational in Nigeria. These measures manifest in the form of different reforms, structural policies, intergovernmental relations, unification programmes etc which had been adopted in the past by different Nigerian government regimes.

Irrespective of the practice of imbuing the Nigerian political structure with corrective and curative measures, both scholars and other interested parties have gone to town for donkey's years to continue their clamour for the restructuring of the federalist political nature of the country with emphasis highly placed on the issue of intergovernmental relations between the federal and sub-national governments, issue of resource control and allocation, issue of revenue allocation, efficiency and functionality of the constitution, inequality of states and local governments in geopolitical zones, security and marginalization amongst others. However, a critical probe into the real reason for this call exposes all to the conflict of interest which has undermined the intention of the proponents. Apart from the genuine reason for using political restructuring as a veritable tool to better Nigeria, some people especially the elite see it as an abstract instrument to gain favour and achieve their self-interest. Many emergency nationalists and opportunists are already using the mantra to make political points ahead of the 2027 general elections. This raises some levels of scepticism because it appears there is no clear difference between the ongoing call for restructuring and the last change mantra deployed as the machinery for the 2023 general elections (Farayibi, 2017).

The history and historiography of the struggle for restructuring of the Nigerian political structure show that it is an age-long practice that has bred conflicts and formation of conflict groups within the Nigerian society. Yaqub (2016) noted that it has polarized the country into a north and south divide with the Southerners being the protagonists and the Northerners being the antagonists. The protagonists argue that under their contribution to the general purse, the principles of justice and equity demand that they should be allowed to control and manage their resources since they bear the impact of oil exploration while the antagonists maintain that oil exploration activities in the south were funded from the agricultural proceeds from cocoa, groundnut, cotton, hides and skin gotten in the north (Ahmed, Norafidah & Knocks, 2017). As already indicated, those opposed to resource control and political restructuring are mostly from the Northern part of the country. Recently, Alhaji Tanko Yakasai stated that the North has a reservation for restructuring because it aims to deny the North revenue and representation. In his words: "the idea behind the agitation for restructuring is to demolish those two advantages that are naturally due to the north in terms of representation and revenue sharing" (Yakasai, 2017:28). The protagonist-antagonist stance on restructuring has resulted in the conflict of interest, conflict of words and even physical violence between the two parties resulting consequently to name calling, exacerbation of the political system and loss of lives and properties. Eze (2016) noted that conflicts in the Nigerian polity arising from restructuring are not limited to the northern-southern stance but

include also ones manifesting like conflictual intergovernmental relationships. Prominent among the restructuring-bred conflicts are the MASSOB Vs Government conflict of 2005/2006 till date, the IPOB Vs Government conflict of 2014/2015 till date, the Lagos state government Vs Federal Government conflict of 2006/2007, the Anambra State Vs Kogi state boundary conflict of 2016, the Niger-delta militants and Niger-delta Avengers Vs Government conflict of 2003/2004 till date, the Boko-Haram Vs Government conflict, the Nigerian-Biafran civil war of 1967-1970 amongst others (Oko, 2015:288)

The Gods are Owners of the Land and the Ecosystem

In Africa, especially in the Niger Delta, the land is very important; it is a cultural construct and has a lot to do with the human person. Inheritance of the family land or ownership of land for that matter is a sign of socio-cultural maturity and coming of age (Ekanem 2002). To be dispossessed of one's land is to be dispossessed of the human person, of one's life. The link between the human person and the land is culturally dramatized at birth. When a new human being is delivered by the traditional birth attendant, the child is delivered on the floor and the afterbirths that remain in his body are cleansed off with sand. What this means is that the new arrival into the family and the lineage has been covenanted with the Earth Deity (*Ikapisong*) Mother Earth, the custodian of justice and morality, from where it has been adopted by the gods, and in a way, divinized, appropriating reincarnation potentiality for the cyclical life of the lineage. In the Nigerian cultural worldview, when a person dies, he goes back to the grave, the belly of Mother Earth, *Ikpaisong*. Much more than this is the fact that the gods are the owners of the land. Humans, especially the elders, hold the land in trust for the gods. Since the gods are the owners of the land, the land, including the forests and the entire ecosystem is sacred. This is the logic behind frequent ritual performances to the various gods of the land before the land is utilised for anything. What this means is that since the chiefs or elders are custodians of the land on behalf of the gods, the people cannot make use of the land without the permission of the elders. Most importantly, foreigners, or even non-indigenes, cannot invade the lands or the seas or rivers without expressed permission and ritual performance because they have neither ancestral nor lineage link with the land. To do that without this religious and cultural permission from the elders is not only an abominable act but also an act that could generate disastrous consequences that could extend even beyond the culprits.

The Vandalisation of the Land as Affront to the Gods and Abominable Act

From the above, there is no gainsaying the fact that the vandalisation of the land, the ecosystem, rivers and the seas, especially by people or agents outside the land is an affront to the gods of the Niger Delta people, an abominable act of no mean dimension. This is more so because through oil exploration, much human blood has been shed, and blood is the source of life given to humans by the gods. This shedding of the blood of the children of the gods of the Niger Delta indeed angers the gods in more ways than one. For Udoh and Olusakin (2018:133), the water is polluted as in the case of the Niger Delta, it becomes undrinkable and has a serious effect on aquatic life.

Calling to mind the aftermath of the hanging of Saro-Wiwa and the other eight activists, the Economist carried a cover drawing of a silhouetted oil derrick exploding in a red stream, with a caption reading “Nigeria Foaming with Blood” (The Economist, 1995:5). Obviously, the “foaming” blood was that of Saro-Wiwa and his compatriots. This image of the frosting bloody oil derrick is important because it is pregnant with the analogy of oil and blood. The rhetoric about death conflated the flow of oil out of Ogoni land with the flow of Saro-Wiwa and his compatriot's live blood. It was as if dying and dissolving into the land without a proper lineage-based burial; Saro-Wiwa and the other activists had ancestral responsibilities for all of Nigeria. Prayers were addressed to them and ominous statements were made about the efficacy of their martyred bodies; they were referred to as sacrifices and acted towards, the missing persons, as though they were becoming powerful political medicines. Most Niger Deltans, cautioned people not to buy Shell gasoline because the gasoline could no longer be trusted as a substance. The body of Nigeria had been cut out when the pit was dug and wounds were bleeding a mixture of oil and blood. Coming into contact with this hybrid substance would be dangerous and polluting.

The image of the flow of blood can also be viewed within the context of the concept of the cosmic body among the people of the Niger Delta. For them, the inner strata of the soil are the wombs of the earth (Bastian, 1996). Within this womb lie crude oil, water and anything that constitutes this cosmic body. Just as in the human body, blood sustains life, so also oil inside the cosmic body. Through oil exploration, the flesh of the earth is ripped off, its womb split open and turned inside out. The cut is as deep and as many as the various oil wells in the Niger Delta and the bleeding is profuse. Certainly, a sacrilegious act has been committed through the shedding of the blood of mother-earth and the gods are angered. There is a violation and desecration of ancestral motherhood and the exposition of her privacy for the public gaze. Not even the forests are spared. They have been violated and desecrated. And the forests are the abode of the Gods and the ancestors. It means therefore that the Nigerian state, along with the oil companies, have committed a matricidal act, an abominable act par excellence, and this can never go unpunished by the gods. According to the custom of the Niger Delta people, any person that commits matricide is ostracized from society and driven into exile, because, by this very act, they have excommunicated themselves from the community. The expulsion of Nigeria from the Common Wealth in the nineties and its isolation by the international community then were deserving and symbolic punishments for matricide (Ekanem 2002).

Violence and Insecurity in Nigeria as Punishment of the Gods

Abacha's regime had been reputed as the most brutal and reviled of the seven military dictators who have misruled Nigeria for almost three decades since independence (Hammer, 1996). He was said to posture over an imagined nation of placid mules at whom he tossed threats and orders from the heights of Aso Rock, our Abuja version of Mount Olympus (Soyinka, 1996). From this heavily fortified enclave, Abacha had systematically turned Africa's most populous nation into one of the world's most

repressive police states. Indeed, with the ascendancy of Abacha, Nigeria became more sinister than ever – a country where rapes, murders and the burning of villages were being carried out as a deliberate policy of state terrorism (Boyd 1995: xii). This was reechoed by Oko and Ndubuwa, (2024:64) when they said that “rape occurrence is a silent epidemic that has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigerian society and Africa at large of which women and children are victims”. A most familiar sound that blared through Nigerian towns then was the cry of a siren, a metaphoric expression of the agony of Nigerians, escorting victims of the regime to detention. There was a constant recycling of repression that made life unbearable. It was what Soyinka (1996: 5) described as “one ongoing actuality of repression very easily obscuring another; a familiar and understandable pattern, one that dictatorships, especially of the most cynical kind, exploit most effectively. It included assassinations, kidnappings and killings,” climaxed in the trial and hanging of Saro-Wiwa.

Resource Control and Restructuring as the Way out to appease the Gods

Through the cutting of the flesh of the earth and the bleeding of blood, we see the disruption of the physical structure of the Niger Delta and by extension, the mythologisation of the Nigerian state in the process of the disruption and search of the structural equilibrium of the Niger Delta. The Niger Delta needs then to be redefined within the context of the Nigerian state. With the deforestation of the land and the rendering of rivers unsuitable for fishing, the entire structural fabric that defined the Niger Delta within the cosmological ambience of Nigeria is disrupted, and nothing exists to replace this disrupted structure. There is a lacuna, in constant search for an enclosure. The solution to the Niger Delta problem will be then the restoration of the disruptive equilibrium of the Nigerian State. That, indeed, is the logic behind the cry for the restructuring of the Nigerian nation.

Oil: A Hegemonic Lubricant

The Niger Delta hosts Nigeria's hydrocarbon deposits and is under the control of two big multinational companies (Chevron and Shell) mandated by the Nigerian government with whom they share the proceeds. The exploitations of hydrocarbon deposits have become a case of human suffering and struggle. Oil was struck in Nigeria for the first time in commercial quantity in the late fifties in Bomu in Ogoni by Shell. In 1964, since the first shipment of the oil left Port Harcourt, multi-million barrels of Nigerian crude oil had been exported. Since then, the system of revenue allocation, the development policies of successive Federal administrations and the insensitivity of the Nigerian elite have turned the Niger Delta and its environs into an ecological disaster and dehumanized inhabitants while the Niger Delta sits in poverty on oil (Saro-Wiwa, 1995).

Oil caused a gradual shift to a more national form of government, entrenching it by the very fact of military rule, by the predominance of oil income in the federal budget and the arrogating by the central government to itself of the biggest share of this new national wealth. Finally, this process was decisively advanced by the break-up of the powerful regions

into a multiplicity of states after 1967, and by the *de facto* acknowledgement of the superiority of the federal public service over that of the country's constituent government (Asiodu 1979: 87-88). Since the beginning of the Oil Bust in the 1980s, Nigerians have experienced spectacular failure upon failure of the system; the soldiers have grown fat on the spoils of their conquest of the Nigerian State. Saro-Wiwa (1994: 11) brings out the pathetic nature of the whole situation by noting that it is ironic that the discovery of oil on their land has brought nothing but misery, hunger and pain. By contrast, oil has brought prosperity, wealth and plenty to those who control the government. What happens in the Niger Delta is of course not a new phenomenon. Modern nations have carried out devastating expansionist policies that have dispossessed minority peoples in order to facilitate the extraction of resources from ethnic territories (Nordstrom & Martin 1992). Such policies often result in genocidal wars of conquest that differ slightly from the numerous wars fought between states, but whose outcomes for ethnic minorities have consistently been far too brutal. In Nigeria, there may not be a full-scale war but there is no denying the fact that oil exploration in the minority ethnic areas of the south has brutalized the people and left them in poverty, penury and deprivation.

In 1992, the federal government set up the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission, AMPADEC, to cater for the plight of oil producing communities. However, some of the projects did not meet the felt-needs of the people as paternalism prevented government from consulting the people before any decision was reached on the type of project to undertake. However, Shell and other companies claim they do not have a legal responsibility to develop the oil areas and that they have met all their statutory obligations by paying their royalties and taxes to government (Ekoriko, 1995). Under Nigeria's petroleum laws, the oil companies pay a royalty of 19% and a petroleum profit tax of 85% net of costs. Shell claims that the development of the oil-producing communities is not its business or any other oil firm's responsibility. This explains the oil companies' indifference to the plight of the communities. Shell, for instance, had no appreciable community development programme until 1992, when protests in oil-producing communities threatened its operations. The point, however, is that the communities do not care about who is responsible for all these practices. Their concern is that oil companies should yield to demands for more income for the local community and the safety of their environment. The host communities thus have no choice but to continue to ask for more support from the oil firms given that they are the ones they see. Indeed, there is a fact that the oil firms cannot escape: that their operations dislocate the economies of the communities and have adverse consequences on their lives. Even if the oil firms have no statutory responsibility, they are morally responsible to the community where they operate their business and whose land they have appropriated for such activities.

The Negative Effects of Oil Exploration

Saro-Wiwa was one of the greatest critiques of Shell's neglect of the oil-producing areas. As far back as 1968, he found it most appalling and intolerable that those who sit on oil should be one of the poorest in the country. He refused "to accept that the only responsibility which

Shell-BP owes our nation is the spoliation of our lands to satisfy the company's needs for the silly sum of five shillings for an acre in an area where 1,200 people live on each square mile of land, and the only source of income as well as subsistence is agriculture” (Saro-Wiwa 1968: 21). Shell's neglect is further manifested in its reluctance to pay compensation for oil spills on grounds of sabotage. According to Greenpeace International, many of Shell's operations and materials are outdated and in poor condition and would be illegal in other parts of the world (Ekoriko, 1995).

The ecology of the oil-producing areas is another area of concern. According to Saro-Wiwa, Ogoni has received from the oil companies a land in which wildlife is unknown; a land, which is, in every sense of the term, an ecological disaster (Saro-Wiwa, 1994). He therefore saw the Ogoni people as being involved in two grim wars, the first of which is the thirty-five-year old ecological war waged by the multinational oil companies, Shell and Chevron. "In this most sophisticated and unconventional war," he says, "no bones are, broken, no blood is spilt and no one is maimed. Yet, men, women and children die; flora, fauna and fish perish, and finally, the land dies" while high-pressure pipelines crisscross the surface of Ogoni farmlands and villages dangerously (Boyd 1995: xi).

Most oil-producing communities are blighted countryside, caught up in an atmosphere full of carbon (iv) oxide and hydrocarbons-poisoned air and water. In Ogoni, soot emitted by gas which has been flared 24 hours a day for decades in very close proximity to human habitation constitutes health hazards. Acid rain, oil spillages and oil blowouts devastate Ogoni territory therefore, "the land that yields the crude oil yields itself to oil. Oil pollutes rivers and kills off fish” (Saro-Wiwa, 1995:16). A classic example of this was the oil spillage at the Nembe creek in Ogoni in 1995. For several days, oil flowed freely into the creeks and the mangrove forest. The area went up in flames when a woman on late night fishing mistakenly set off the fire with her lantern. The creek burnt, destroying much of the aquatic life in the area (Olukoya, 1995). The situation is captured by Boyd who writes “what was once a placid rural community of prosperous farmers and fishermen is now an ecological wasteland reeking of sulphur, its creeks and water holes poisoned by indiscriminate oil spillage and ghoulishly lit at night by the orange flames of gas flares” (Boyd 1995:x).

The Trial and Hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa

In May 1994, the four Ogoni Chiefs accused of taking bribes from the military and supposedly described as vultures that did not deserve to live were killed by what looked like a crowd of pro-Saro-Wiwa youths. This seemed to be the opportunity the government was looking for. Saro-Wiwa and thirteen others were arrested and a special tribunal was set up to adjudicate the case. The report has it that the trial was widely condemned as a sham. We do not intend to get into details of the trial as this has already got into the realm of memory and current tribunal discussion. It is just sufficient to state that the transcript of the judgement confirms the biased and unjust nature of the trial. According to Bimbaum (1995:2), an

analysis of a leading jurist concludes that:

The judgement of the Tribunal is not merely wrong, illogical or perverse. It is downright dishonest. The tribunal consistently advanced arguments, that no experienced lawyer could believe to be logical or just. I believe that the tribunal first decided on its verdict and then sought the arguments to justify them. No barrel was too deep to be scraped.

The Inversion of Saro-Wiwa

The execution was therefore well thought out. It had to be death by hanging, which, in Nigeria, is rooted in colonialism. Nevertheless, even in the colonial period it was very sparingly used (Bastian 1996: 12). The gallows was the colonizer's ultimate sanction, "making to do with a death technology that could be locally produced rather than expending more precious ammunition in the bodies of captive felons" (Bastian 1996: 12). For the ethnic people of South-Southern Nigeria, hanging is similar to suicide, which is a very shameful death. In fact, among these people, hanging is an abominable death because it is associated with suicide, which is considered one of the worst human offences (Ekanem 2002). Among the Annang of South-South Nigeria, affine of Ogoni, *Ikpa-Isong*, the earth deity prohibits it because the corpse is not properly aligned with the earth's body and therefore not properly dead. Apart from this, the corpse is held vertically when the more appropriate posture should be a horizontal one, first close to the earth on the bed or on the ground where the person died, then placed into the earth where *Abot* (the creator God) can reclaim her contribution to human bodyliness, its form. The hung or suicidal man is also offensive to the earth because he is suspended over her and does not make proper human connections with the ground. He is suspended midway, a symbol of degradation and inconsequentiality (Ekanem 2002). He is what the Annang call a wondering ghost (*mfum-mfum ekpo*) who neither enters into the realm of the living death nor remains in the world of the living. Equally, because "the spirits of such dead people are not admitted into the company of the blessed departed, they end up becoming wandering ghosts or spirits, caught between the land of the dead and the world of man" (Akpan, Ekanem and Oko, 2023:135). In other words, he has no dwelling place; he is deprived of ancestral dimension, robbed of reincarnation potentiality and therefore "taking himself out of this important site of spiritual and bodily exchange" (Bastian 1996: 13). Since among the South-South Nigerians, death is the "senior brother" of sleep, to die standing is abnormal since the corpse is not properly displayed. The horizontal link between the death and the living community is cut. With no more link with the community, he cannot be mourned neither can his kin gaze at his "dead face." Therefore, he cannot be buried but dragged to the forest where the body is eaten by vultures and maggots.

The Analogy of Oil and Blood

In the aftermath of the hanging of Saro-Wiwa and the other eight activists, the Economist carried a cover drawing of a silhouetted oil derrick exploding in a red stream, with a caption reading "Nigeria Foaming with Blood" (The Economist, 1995: 5). Obviously, the "foaming" blood was that of Saro-Wiwa and his compatriots. This image of the frosting bloody oil

derrick is important because it is pregnant with the analogy of oil and blood. The rhetoric about the death conflated the flow of oil out of Ogoni land with the flow of Saro-Wiwa and his compatriot's life-blood. It was as if dying and dissolving into the land without a proper, lineage-based burial, Saro-Wiwa and the other activists had ancestral responsibilities for all of Nigeria. Prayers were addressed to them and ominous statements were made about the efficacy of their martyred bodies; they were referred to as sacrifices and acted towards, the missing persons, as though they were becoming powerful political medicines. Nigerians cautioned people not to buy Shell gasoline because the gasoline could no longer be trusted as a substance. The body of Nigeria had been cut out when the pit was dug and wounds were bleeding a mixture of oil and blood. Coming into contact with this hybrid substance would be dangerous and polluting. Ken Saro-Wiwa's angry spirit seemed to have entered the world's gasoline pumps - and would soon be credited with entering into the engines of a private jet that carried Abacha's son and his entourage to their deaths in Kano airport.

The image of the flow of blood can also be viewed within the context of the concept of the cosmic body among the people of South-South Nigeria. For them, the inner strata of the soil are the wombs of the earth (Bastian 1996: 9). Within this womb lie crude oil, water and anything that constitutes this cosmic body. Just as in the human body, blood sustains life, so also oil inside the cosmic body. Through oil exploration the flesh of the earth is ripped off, its womb split open and turned inside out. The cut is as deep and as many as the-various oil wells in the Niger Delta and the bleeding is profuse. Certainly, a sacrilegious act has been committed through the shedding of the blood of mother-earth and the Gods are angered. There is a violation and desecration of ancestral motherhood and the exposition of her privacy for the public gaze. Not even the forests are spared. They have been violated and desecrated, and the forests are the abode of the Gods and the ancestors. It means therefore that the Nigerian state, along with the oil companies, have committed a matricidal act, an abominable act par excellence, and this can never go unpunished by the gods. According to the custom of the Niger Delta people, any man person that commits matricide is ostracized from society and driven into exile, because, by this very act, he has excommunicated himself from the community. The expulsion of Nigeria from the Common Wealth then and its isolation by the international community were deserving and symbolic punishment for matricide.

Conclusion

It is evident that the conflict and violence prevalent in Nigeria come as a result of social stratification and major institutional inequalities in access to wealth, status, and power. This was re-echoed by Oko and Ogbodo (2022:22) when they said: "that humanity is sustained through a relationship with the external world and social existence". We have been dealing with the drama of the Ogoni people and the machinery of the State and its economic powers. The dominant groups are propelled by a desire to control the wealth of the nation, a wealth that emanates from the periphery. They are at the centre, controlling the political scene, dominating, alienating, cheating and exploiting the periphery. There is therefore an inversion

of the periphery; it opens up, resisting and resorting to violence in a bid to change the *status quo*. Therefore, there is a standoff between the periphery and the centre. The centre responds with more violence and brutality. This violence on the part of the centre is considered inevitable for according to them order and security of the state is paramount. Of course Hobbes and Locke had before now argued in favour of the centre that such violence is inevitable when they proposed that government had been instituted because of the recognition that human ends were best served by controlling the right of individuals to pursue their individual interests by any means; and Nigeria has been a beneficiary of this political legacy. Consequently, for the security of the state, which unfortunately may translate to the security of the wealthy and powerful small elite, people are either legally sacrificed or clandestinely assassinated and detained under inhuman conditions. This is where the paradoxes and the interplay of metaphors lie. The centre is strong but it is afraid of the latent power of the periphery and therefore both the weak and the strong are living in fear. This insecurity of the heavily secured centre is aptly reported by Hammer (1996) that Abacha rarely ventured out of Aso Rock and was always accompanied by a phalanx of armed guards when he did. His only companions were a clique of loyal military officers and a growing parade of Rasputin-like sorcerers and soothsayers who reportedly performed marginal rituals at appointed hours. He had made himself a hostage. He had so many enemies he was too scared to go out.

Thus, oil pollution, which destroys farmlands and kills fishes; the hanging of Saro-Wiwa and the decay of his body in Mother Earth; the breaking down of all social structures, etc., are manifestations of the pathological state of Nigeria. The oil fields are also arenas of paradoxes and spaces for the interplay of metaphors. Nigerian oil wells are overflowing with oil and the oil is making millions of dollars every day, but the nation is not overflowing with plenty as the price of fuel are bought by the Nigerian populace over one thousand naira per liter. In spite of oil with its lubricating qualities, the nation's treasury is dry and charred. Ours has thus been a nation raped, a nation of betrayal and revenge (Udoimem, 2000). The path to authentic nationhood lies in the realisation of the folly of mutual-inflicted wounds. It is walking the path of equity and reconciliation.

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